

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6525

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

DIA WASHDC

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1176

E.JO. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, LE

SUBJ: LT. KHATIB

1. FOLLOWING INFORMATION ON LT. KHATIB, COMMANDER OF THE LEBANESE "ARAB LIBERATION ARMY", COMES FROM GOOD SOURCES AND MAY BE OF INTEREST TO ADDRESSEES. NYT CORRESPONDENT MARKHAM VISITED KHATIB AT HIS HEAD-QUARTERS NEAR MAR ELIAS IN THE BEKAA MIDDLE OF LAST WEEK. HE FOUND LARGE NUMBER OF BEKAA VILLAGE SHEIKHS IN ANTE-ROOM AND ATMOSPHERE OF DISCIPLINE AND LEADERSHIP PREVALENT. INSIGNIA HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM UNIFORMS, BUT KHATIB TOLD MARKHAM HE HAD NUMBER OF FORMER LEBANESE ARMY OFFICERS IN HIS COMMAND, INCLUDING TWO MAJORS, FORMER COMMANDER OF A UNIT NEAR TRIPOLI AND ANOTHER IN EL-HERMEL.

2. KHATIB, HIMSELF, IMPRESSED MARKHAM WITH HIS SELF-ASSURANCE, CHARISMA AND CONFIDENCE -- "POSSIBLY A NASSER IN THE MAKING." IN ADDITION TO ARABIC, HE SPOKE EXCELLENT FRENCH AND PASSABLE ENGLISH. KHATIB VOWED LEBANON WOULD NEVER RETURN TO STATUS QUO ANTE AND HE, HIMSELF, WOULD NOT RETURN TO LEBANESE ARMY. LEBANON MUST BECOME AN "ARAB STATE," HE SAID.

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3. AHMED MOHAMED KHATIB, COUSIN OF LT. KHATIB, WAS SEAT PARTNER OF EMBOFF FROM CAIRO TO DAMASCUS FEB 26 AND SHARED FOLLOWING INFO ON KHATIB'S AND HIS OWN ACTIVITIES. KHATIB HAD BEEN IN CHARGE OF LEBANESE ARMY UNIT (FASILAH) IN ZAHLE WHICH WAS ORDERED TO SHELL NEARBY MUSLIM HAMLET OF HAUSH EL-OMARA (PHON). HE REFUSED AND WAS IMMEDIATELY DIVESTED OF HIS COMMAND AND TRANSFERRED TO THE SHUF IN SOUTHERN LEBANON WHERE HE MUTINIED. HE IS SUNNI BUT WITH CLOSE CONNECTIONS TO JUMBLATT. HE COMES FROM MAJDEL ANJAR AND THUS IS PARTICULARLY INFLUENTIAL IN THE EASTERN BAKAA. ALTHOUGH LEBANON WAS NO LONGER PAYING SALARIES OF SOLDIERS OF "ARAB LIBERATION ARMY," KHATIB CLAIMED THEY WERE PAID REGULARLY BEFORE END OF EVERY MONTH AND MONEY CAME FROM LIBYA. SYRIANS, HE SAID, WERE NOT SUPPORTING KHATIB AND IN FACT CONSIDERED HIM A PROBLEM.

4. AS FOR AHMED MOHAMED KHATIB'S OWN ACTIVITIES, HE WAS VISITING HIS BROTHER, A STUDENT AT CAIRO UNIVERSITY NOW LIVING IN CAIRO. WHILE THERE, HE WAS SUMMONED TO EGYPTIAN SECURITY (MUKHABARAT) AND, AFRAID, TOOK HIS BROTHER WITH HIM. HE WAS USHERED INTO THE OFFICE OF A MAJOR ABDULLAH, LUXURIOUSLY FURNISHED, AND GIVEN SOFT SELL. WHAT EGYPTIAN WANTED TO KNOW WAS NAMES OF PHALANGIST LEADERS IN BAKAA. AHMED HAD REFUSED TO REVEAL THEM AT ONCE (THOUGH HE KNEW MANY OF THEM), BUT WAS NOW ON MISSION TO OBTAIN THEM FOR EGYPTIAN INTELLIGENCE. THE INFORMATION WAS TO BE DELIVERED TO A CERTAIN INDIVIDUAL IN THE EGYPTIAN EMBASSY IN BEIRUT. PROBLEMS WOULD BE CREATED FOR HIS BROTHER, KHATIB BELIEVED, IF HE DID NOT COMPLY.

5. AHMED MOHAMED KHATIB LIVES IN MAJDEL ANJAR AND ASSISTS HIS FATHER IN OPERATING A SMALL STORE IN THAT VILLAGE. THAT WAS HIS FIRST TRIP TO EGYPT TO VISIT HIS BROTHER, A FOURTH YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT AT CAIRO UNIVERSITY.
MURPHY

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